

****ATTENTION****

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Conservation of

HAWKS



marsh
hawk

In the State of Washington

Hawks are one of the most misunderstood and unappreciated groups of birds. Since they are birds of prey, and sometimes kill poultry and game birds, they have been severely persecuted, and their numbers have been greatly reduced. The group of birds generally recognized as "hawks" includes 13 species that occur in Washington. All hawks eat animal foods, but no plant foods.

Value

Hawks perform a service to farmers and sportsmen by controlling the number of rodents, which destroy crops and compete with game birds for food. In addition, some hawks serve as scavengers, cleaning up carcasses of animals which have been killed by accidents or other means. People enjoy watching hawks as they soar high in the air, perch on a roadside pole, or dive after their prey.

All hawks are protected by law in Washington. They may be legally killed only while in the act of pursuing or killing domestic fowl or game birds.

Identification

Identification of hawks is sometimes difficult. Color patterns vary greatly within a species. Males and females are usually unlike, and juveniles often take several years to attain adult plumage. Dark phases are common, and some individuals may be almost black. The major groups of hawks, however, can be distinguished by their shapes.



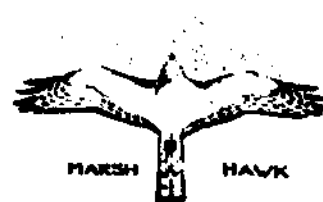
buteos



accipiters



falcons



Buteos are large, broad-winged hawks with fan-shaped tails and wing spread up to five feet. This group is represented in Washington by the red-tailed, Swainson's, rough-legged, and ferruginous hawks. They are usually seen in open country, soaring on rising air currents or perching on poles. They are almost wholly beneficial, living on small mammals, insects, and snakes. They rarely catch healthy birds. The nest is a bulky platform of sticks, high in a tree or on a rocky ledge.

Accipiters include the robin-sized sharp-shinned hawk, the intermediate Cooper's hawk, and the goshawk, large and powerful enough to capture poultry, game birds, or rabbits. These birds have short and broad wings, and long tails. They are usually found in wooded or brushy areas. Their prey consists largely of birds and a few mammals. Nesting is high in a tree, in woodland.

Falcons are swift, powerful birds, with long and pointed wings, and long tails. Washington members of this group are the prairie and peregrine falcons with wing spreads of $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 feet; and the pigeon hawk and sparrow hawk, which are about the size of a mourning dove. The sparrow hawk differs from its bird-eating relatives in many respects. It prefers a diet of insects and mice. It is one of our most common hawks, while the other falcons are so rare that they do little damage to bird populations. The sparrow hawk nests in old woodpecker holes, natural cavities, and bird boxes; other falcons prefer inaccessible cliffs or trees.

The marsh hawk, our only representative of a group called "harriers," is a medium-sized hawk with a long tail and a large white band on its rump. It can be easily identified by its flight, gliding low over meadows, fields, and marshes in search of mice, ground squirrels, or an occasional bird. Marsh hawks nest on the ground, in grassland. The male is light gray, the female brown.

The osprey, or fish hawk, one of our most interesting birds of prey, is often mistaken for an eagle. It is larger than the buteo hawks, but smaller than the eagles. It feeds almost entirely on fish, which it catches with a spectacular plunge into the water. Suckers, squawfish, and other scrap fish are taken, as well as game fish, without apparent preference. The nest, a high structure of sticks, lined with softer material, is usually conspicuously placed in a tall dead snag or on a cliff. Osprey numbers are too few to constitute any threat to game fish populations.

Golden and American eagles are sometimes mistaken for hawks. The American eagle does not have a white head until three years old and the young are therefore similar to golden eagles. The American eagle, our National symbol, is becoming very scarce and should be completely protected.

As a group, hawks are well-deserving of the protection afforded them by law. Farmers can encourage them by cautioning hunters not to shoot at them. If adequate escape cover is available, game birds do not seem to be adversely affected by hawks. Since most hawks use the same nest year after year, these sites should be protected from destruction.